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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the stages that are involved in implementing an induction or mentoring program for beginning teachers in public school districts: (1) sketicism and some reluctance to become involved--the initial reaction from all parties, i.e., administrators, beginning teachers, and mentors; (2) acceptance--during this period, there is general consensus from all participants that the program is not going to go away and some good may come of it; (3) resolution--there has been enough experience with the new program for all to begin to acknowledge the benefits they perceive to accrue; and (4) commitment--participants in the program are convinced of the need to provide assistance to beginning teachers. It is pointed out that it takes time for participants to realize how much gain can be achieved through induction/mentor programs, and experience with the program for individuals and groups as a whole to become fully committed. (JD)

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Real World Implementation of Induction or Mentoring Programs for Beginning Teachers

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Author Notes

Dr. Beverly J. Klug is an associate professor of education in the College of Education at Idaho State University. She has been involved with programs for teacher induction/teacher mentoring for the past six years. In addition, she teaches classes on mentoring and the skills involved in working successfully with beginning teachers and administrators.

Real World Implementation of Induction or Mentoring Programs for Beginning Teachers

Introduction:

For the past six years I have been involved with introducing the concept of "induction" into the teaching profession beginning in Oklahoma with the implementation of The Entry Year Assistance Act, H B 1706 and then in working with school districts in Southeastern Idaho to begin local induction programs. During this time, I have been able to utilize my training as a ethnographer to make observations of the responses which occur when a new system such as this is introduced into the public schools. What follows is the result of observations made during the past six years concerning the stages that are involved in implementing an induction or mentoring program for beginning teachers in public school districts.

Stages of Implementation for Induction/Mentoring Programs

Stage 1: Skepticism (September to November). The announcement of an induction or mentoring program for beginning teachers initially draws skepticism and some reluctance to become involved from all parties: administrators, beginning teachers, and mentors. The common perception is that if the beginning teacher passed through the student teaching experience successfully, then he/she will be well prepared to face any difficulties which may arise. Unfortunately, this is not the case (Godley, Klug, and Wilson, 1985; Lieberman and Miller,

1984). Common perceptions encountered on the part of beginning teachers include viewing the program provided as one more hoop to jump through before people will allow them the autonomy they need to be "real" teachers. Most beginning teachers are also unable to consider the possibility that they will encounter difficulties for fear that this will reflect negatively on their ability to assume the role of teacher.

Mentors commonly believe that they have nothing to offer new teachers, and that new teachers will be offended by any suggestions or offers of assistance which they could proffer to their proteges. Some are afraid that they will be ineffective in their new roles because they have not been apprised of the latest teaching techniques. Some mentors also view their roles as superfluous: they received informal mentoring from their own peers when they began teaching, so why is a formal mentoring/induction program needed? Unfortunately, "going through the fire" of the first year of teaching has been allowed to be acceptable for too long a period in the teaching profession.

Administrators may not only view the formalized program with skepticism, but may also resent the implication that not enough was done in their own buildings in past years to assist beginning teachers. Administrators may also feel that their authority will be undermined as the beginning teacher will be assigned to work with a peer and encouraged to take problems to that individual rather than the principal's office.

In the initial stage of implementation, if administrators are involved in a team approach to mentoring as is the case in many states/school districts, they may be unsure of their own roles (Godley, Klug and Wilson, 1988). According to Dr. Harris Allen of the Pocatello Public School District #25 in Pocatello, Idaho, administrators involved for the first time in implementation of an induction program (1988-89) felt torn between their roles as supervisors and as evaluators. They did not want information gathered in their roles on induction teams to influence their decisions as evaluators, but were unsure about their abilities to separate the two. This created some hesitancy on their part to want to completely commit to the program.

The building of trust between all parties involved is an important aspect of this period. Interestingly, it appears that elementary teachers have an easier time assuming the role of "mentor" than secondary teachers. This may be due to the fact that elementary teachers are not as isolated from their peers as secondary teachers are, both in terms of subject matter and physical space. Many elementary teachers cross over between grade levels and students, whereas secondary teachers are more clearly content area oriented. As one secondary teacher expressed it, "We don't feel that we need to look out for each other."

Stage 2: Acceptance (November to January). During this period of time, there is a general consensus from all participating individuals that the program is not going to go

away and that maybe some good can come of it. Mentors are settling into their roles and beginning teachers are feeling more comfortable with the idea of approaching a colleague with questions concerning a myriad of difficulties which present themselves. Administrators are feeling less threatened as they realize that their authority is not being undermined and that if any serious difficulty arises, they will be aware of the problem.

The trust that was built during the first stage is now in place and felt by all participants. The beginning teacher is now enjoying some tangible results of the assistance provided by the induction/mentoring process. This could be in many forms, ranging from materials supplied by the mentor to accompany particular lesson plans, practical suggestions discipline techniques, or as in one case, the actual removal of an emotionally disturbed student from the beginning teacher's classroom in order to ease the burden.

Lest we are less than candid, the mentor/protege relationship does not always materialize into what initially seemed to be so promising (Shulman and Colbert, 1987). Unfortunately, personalties do not always match and styles of teaching are not always complimentary. In these situations, stress can develop between the mentor and protege as ways of resolving differences are explored. It should be noted that the balance of mentor/protege relationships are very productive and individuals feel that these relationships are important in their

influence on professional growth for those involved (Godley, Klug, and Wilson, 1987).

Stage 3: Resolution (January to March). At this stage, there has been enough experience with the new program for all to begin acknowledging the benefits they perceive to accrue. Beginning teachers realize that they have received the assistance they needed without fear of reprisal. The program is moving steadily and individuals are feeling comfortable with their roles.

Mentors are beginning to realize the benefits they too are receiving as a result of their participation in the program (Godley, Klug, and Wilson, 1987). At the same time, administrators realize overall benefits to the first year teachers, mentors, students in the classroom, and to themselves as administrators (Godley, Klug, and Wilson, 1988). These benefits include the sharing of classroom knowledge and expertise with faculty members and the development of collegial relationships.

According to Dr. Allen, this is the stage where administrators begin to see the program being implemented as "our program," not someone else's ideas that have been imposed upon them. Because of this, the program for beginning teachers becomes more meaningful to them.

Stage 4: Commitment (March on). In this last stage, participants in the program are convinced of the need to provide

assistance to beginning teachers. Comments such as "Why didn't we do this before?" are commonly expressed. This is also the time when participants begin to explore the possibilities for the continuance of the program if it represents a pilot program. This may mean exploring district funding possibilities, state funding sources, or grant resources in order to ensure the program will be available for next year's new teachers. For those in Southeastern Idaho, as well as the State Department of Education this meant an appearance before the state legislature committee handling the area of providing funding for programs for beginning teachers. As a result of testimony given concerning program benefits, legislators passed Senate Bill 1264, Section 9 which provides funding for Idaho's Mentor Program.

Summary

There is a great deal of evidence which points to the overall beneficial results of providing induction/mentoring programs for beginning teachers which can be found in the literature. When opportunities present themselves for the development and implementation of such programs, those who are involved in decision-making should not hesitate to provide those opportunities for professional development to new teachers in their areas.

However, a caveat is in order: not everyone is going to receive the news that such a program is being provided with the enthusiasm and excitement the planners imagine. It takes time

for participants to realize how much gain can be realized through induction/mentor programs, as well as experience with the programs for individuals and groups as a whole to become fully committed. Once that commitment is attained, questions like "When do we begin planning for next year?" are the ones most frequently heard.

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